

Mindful mealtimes



BETTER HEALTH CO.

Mindful eating

What is mindfulness?

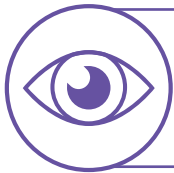
Mindfulness means slowing down and really paying attention to whatever we're doing in the present moment. It means being aware of what's happening around us and our thoughts and feelings, and doing so without being judgemental or getting distracted.

Did you know, we can be mindful when we are eating? Mindful eating is the key to eating well, and enjoying our food. It means paying full attention to our food – when we buy it, cook it, serve it, and eat it!

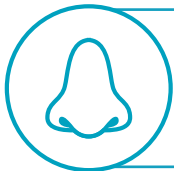


Our five senses

To eat mindfully we need to engage our five senses.



See – With our eyes we can see colours, shapes and textures.



Smell – With our nose we can smell.



Hear – Our ears help us hear sounds.



Taste – Our tongue helps us taste food. Food can taste sweet, salty, spicy, sour or bitter.



Touch – When our hands touch, we can feel if things are sticky, hard or soft.

How to be a mindful eater



Sit down at the table to eat.

Chew more and take a breath between bites.

Approach cooking and eating with a positive attitude.

Eat when you are feeling hungry.

Don't rush, slow down while eating.

Eat the amount of food your body needs.

Admire the taste of your food.

Pay attention to the texture of foods.

Set your fork down between bites.

Eat at regular times each day.

Eat food from a plate, rather than from a packet.

Be open to trying new foods.

Respect your body and health.

Eat food you like the taste of.

Eat with others.

Mindful eating experiment



Practice using your five senses to eat mindfully.

Prepare a small piece of food, ready to eat. For example, a piece of fruit, a vegetable, a piece of chocolate or a dry biscuit.

Then work through each of the steps. Try to keep quiet and focus all your attention on the food you're about to eat.

1



Pick up the piece of food. Place it in the palm of your hand. Feel how heavy the food is in your hand. Pretend like you've never seen this food before. Examine it closely.

2



Ask yourself, what is this food called? Where has it come from? Was it grown on a tree, bush, vine or underground? How was the food made? Is it cooked? How was it cooked or who cooked it?

3



Notice what you can see when you're looking at the food. What's the shape, colour and texture of the food?

4



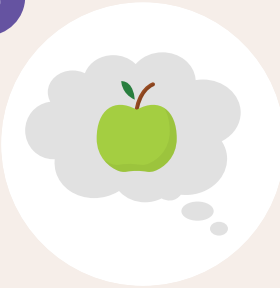
Touch the food with your fingers and feel its texture. What does it feel like? Is it sticky? Hard? Soft? Rough?

5



Now begin to bring the food up to your nose. Notice the muscles in your arm and fingers as you bring the food to your mouth. Slowly breathe in several times and focus on the different smells. What does this food smell like? Does it remind you of something else?

6



Is your mouth watering? If you have any thoughts like, “hurry up and let me eat the food” or “why is this taking so long” take a deep breath and bring your attention back to the food.

7



Now, slowly take a small bite of the food. Did that make a sound? Try not to chew it or swallow it just yet. Notice the feeling and taste of the food in your mouth. Carefully, move the food around your mouth. How does it feel on your tongue? What does it sound like when you chew the food?

8



Try to notice the moment where you feel like you want to swallow the food. Slowly swallow, focus on what that feels like. Do you notice any lingering tastes or sensations?



How was this different from your normal way of eating? Could you commit to trying this the next time you eat? You don't have to eat this way all the time, but you could try to set aside 5 minutes of a meal once per week to practice this way of mindful eating.

Hunger versus cravings

Do you know the difference between true hunger and a craving?

Hunger is our body's way of telling us it needs food whereas cravings are psychological - it's a desire to eat something even when you're not hungry.

Eating when we are truly feeling hungry can help us eat mindfully and provide our body with regular fuel.



Hunger

- The desire to eat because of a rumbling stomach, feeling tired, or low in energy.
- This is a physiological (body) need.
- It will get worse if we don't eat.
- Usually when we are hungry, we will eat whatever will fill us up.

Craving

- The desire to eat something even if you are not hungry.
- This is a psychological (mind) need.
- It may be related to a particular feeling like feeling sad, bored or stressed.
- Usually we only want a particular food, no other food will satisfy us.



Everyone has cravings. Cravings may be related to a particular feeling like feeling sad, bored or stressed. A common craving people may experience is wanting something sweet after dinner.



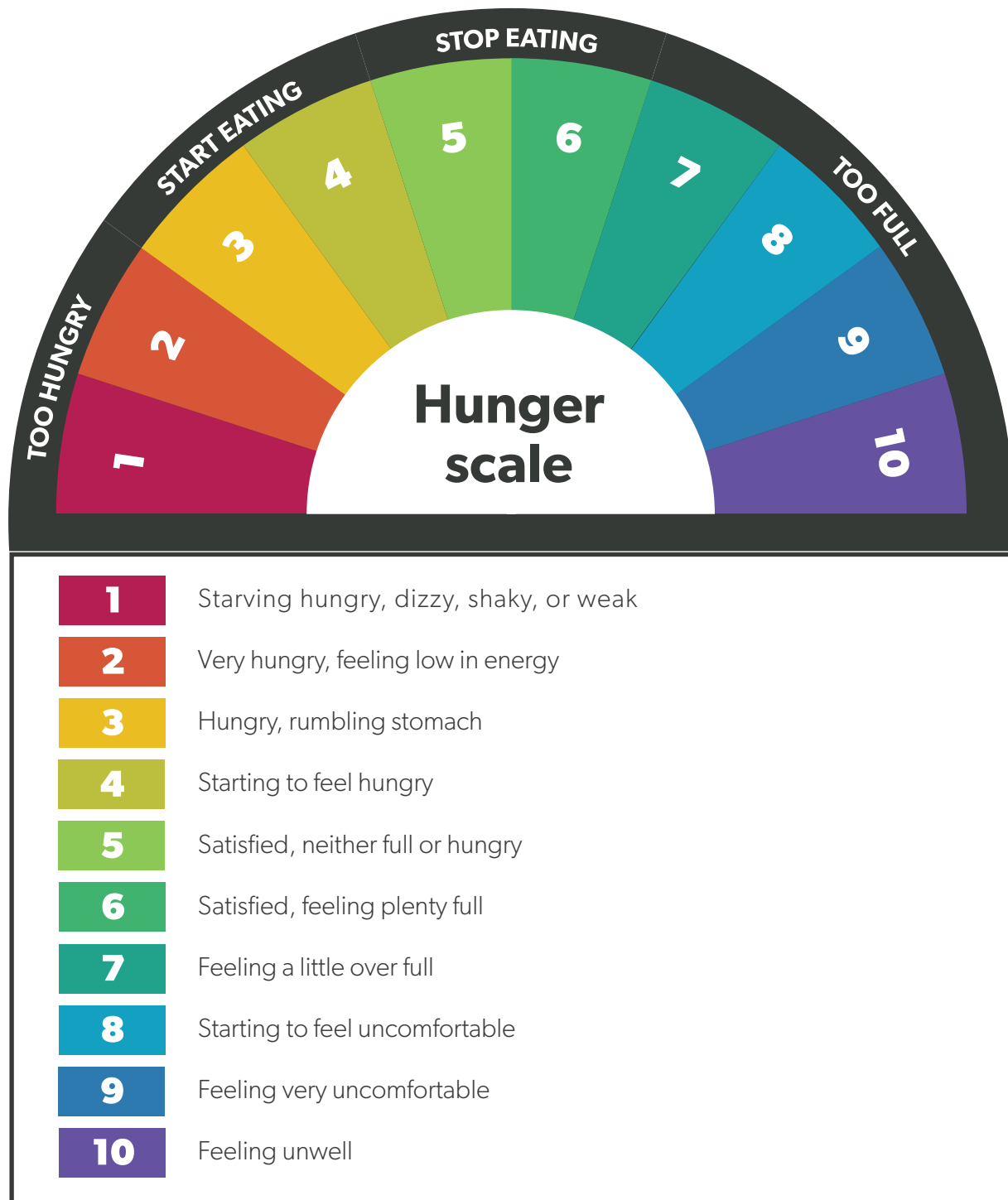
Some ways to manage cravings

- Find something else to do as a distraction.
- Eat regular meals to avoid being over hungry which can lead to craving certain foods.
- Try to keep foods you may be craving out of the house.
- Have a healthy snack instead and see if your craving passes.
- Craving not going away? Have a small amount of the food to satisfy the craving and try eating it mindfully. Sometimes if we avoid cravings again and again, the craving starts to get worse and worse.

Hunger scale

The hunger scale is a tool you can use to gauge how hungry you are before and after eating. On the scale you can see a range of numbers. One is most hungry and ten is least hungry.

Ideally, you want to start eating when you're at a three or four on the scale – so when you are feeling hungry but not so hungry that you feel unwell or low in energy. You also want to try to stop eating at five or six on the scale. It takes a bit of time for your brain to register that your stomach is full, so stopping eating when you're just satisfied can help to avoid feeling uncomfortably stuffed and unwell.



Mealtimes roles

Everyone should be able to make their own food choices at mealtimes.

When you have a meal, you get to decide what to eat, based on what is available to you. However, you don't always get to choose which foods are on offer.

At mealtimes there is usually one person who provides the meal – the provider, and one or more people who eat the meal – the decider.

Provider



It is the provider's role to:

Decide what, when and where to eat.
This involves:

- Choosing and preparing food.
- Providing regular meals and snacks.
- Making mealtimes structured, pleasant and stress-free.
- Making meals with a variety of foods, that are tasty.
- Choosing where to eat.

Decider



It is the decider's role to:

Eat the food and decide how much or whether they eat at all. This involves:

- Coming to the table at mealtimes feeling hungry, but not starving.
- Choosing the amount of food to eat from what is offered.
- Listening to your body, to know what and how much to eat.



The provider and the decider both play a role and get to make certain choices. If you're preparing meals for yourself, you are fulfilling both roles at the same time.

Helpful mealtime phrases

When we want to eat healthy, it's common to put pressure on ourselves or others to eat in a certain way. But, pressure often makes mealtimes stressful!

Try these helpful phrases at your next mealtime to create a more enjoyable mealtime experience for all. These phrases are particularly helpful for parents and carers, but can be used by anyone to make mealtimes more enjoyable for everyone.

"Is that the first time you tried that food? What did you think?"

Encouraging others to reflect on why they enjoyed eating is helpful.

"I understand you don't feel like it today. It's there if you change your mind."

Respecting and trusting that other people's appetites is important.

"You're still getting comfortable with some foods and that is okay."

Acknowledging that eating can be overwhelming can be comforting and helpful.

"It's okay if you're not feeling hungry or don't want to eat but come sit with us and have a chat."

This is helpful by encouraging others to listen to their body's hunger and fullness signals.

"It's okay to eat that. Sit down and enjoy it."

Encouraging others to enjoy all types of food can give them confidence to make their own food choices.

"It looks like you really enjoyed that meal. How did it taste?"

Encouraging someone to engage their five senses at mealtimes can help them eat mindfully.

Eating regular meals

Do you know how many meals and snacks you should aim to eat each day?

3 Main meals per day



You should aim to eat 3 main meals per day: breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Up to **3** snacks per day



You should aim to eat up to 3 snacks per day: usually between each main meal.



This may not be perfect every day, every week. Some days you might have 5 – 6 smaller meals and that's okay too.

Other ways to eat regularly

- Eating meals and snacks at set times each day.
- Eating meals and snacks with others at a table.
- Making sure everyone is offered the same meal at mealtimes, and food is enjoyed together.
- Going to the table hungry and eating until we've had enough.
- Eating a variety of foods that we enjoy and will fill us up, so we're not hungry between meals and snacks.
- Putting away anything that may be a distraction when eating including screens (such as phones, tablets, games, or the TV).
- Slowing down and enjoying your food – don't rush. Enjoy every bite until you've had enough.

Blast off with breakfast

Have you heard the saying 'breakfast is the most important meal of the day'? Well, it's not wrong. Breakfast...

- Gives you energy for your day
- Breaks your overnight fast
- Kickstarts your metabolism
- Improves your concentration and memory
- Makes it easier to make healthy food choices
- Helps you to meet daily nutrient needs

Breakfast is the most important meal of the day

Quick and easy breakfast ideas

- Tub of reduced fat yoghurt
- A piece of fruit
- Chia pudding or overnight oats
- Slice frittata or mini frittata
- Toasted sandwich
- Smoothie
- Slice of toast
- Wholemeal roti
- Congee (rice porridge) in a thermos
- Trail mix or homemade muesli bar



Struggling to have breakfast? Here are some things to try.

Don't have time or can't be bothered in the morning.

- Prepare something the night before.
- Wake up 10 minutes earlier to make time for breakfast.
- Choose options that are quick and easy to prepare, like toast or a smoothie.
- Plan what you're going to have for breakfast at the start of the week and prepare it in bulk, like overnight oats!
- If you really don't have time for breakfast, make sure to have a filling morning tea!

Don't know what to have.

- Ask friends and family what they enjoy.
- See what's available at the supermarket.
- Think about the foods you or your family enjoy eating and add some fruit and vegetables to it.
- Start with something simple such as toast can be sweet, savoury or plain!
- Don't limit yourself to typical 'breakfast' foods.

Not hungry in the morning.

- Take the time to stop and listen to your hunger cues. Is your tummy grumbling?
- Try to eat a breakfast meal at the table without distractions.
- Try not to have coffee, juice or milk first thing in the morning. This could be filling you up instead!
- Really not hungry? It's okay, some people just aren't hungry in the morning! Eat your first meal of the day as soon as you start to feel hungry but, don't wait until you're starving. It might be at morning tea!



Putting this into practice

Below is a list of suggested SMART goals that you may choose to work on.



Tick ✓ the goals you would like to work on right now and cross ✗ the goals you don't need to work on right now. Then, select two to three goals to work on at a time. Or write your own goals in the section below. Remember, goals can be adapted to be easier or harder, so they are suitable for you and your current situation.

SMART Goal suggestions

- Eat meals as a family or with friends three times this week.
- Serve everyone at the table the same meal at mealtimes every day this week.
- Eat three meals and two to three snacks at regular mealtimes every day this week.
- Drink water, rather than other food and drinks, between regular meal and snack times every day this week.
- Cook or prepare a meal with others at least once this week.
- Remove distractions, like screens, at mealtimes every day this week.
- Use helpful mealtime phrases when eating with others at least three times this week.
- Eat breakfast every day this week.
- Serve meals on a plate every day this week.
- Sit at the table at mealtimes every day this week.
- Use the hunger scale before and after eating at least three times this week.
- Set your fork down between bites when eating meals at least three times this week.
- Try a new food at least three times this week.
- Cook a new recipe / meal and share it with others once this week.

My goals to work on are: